Seirei no Moribito

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Chapter 4

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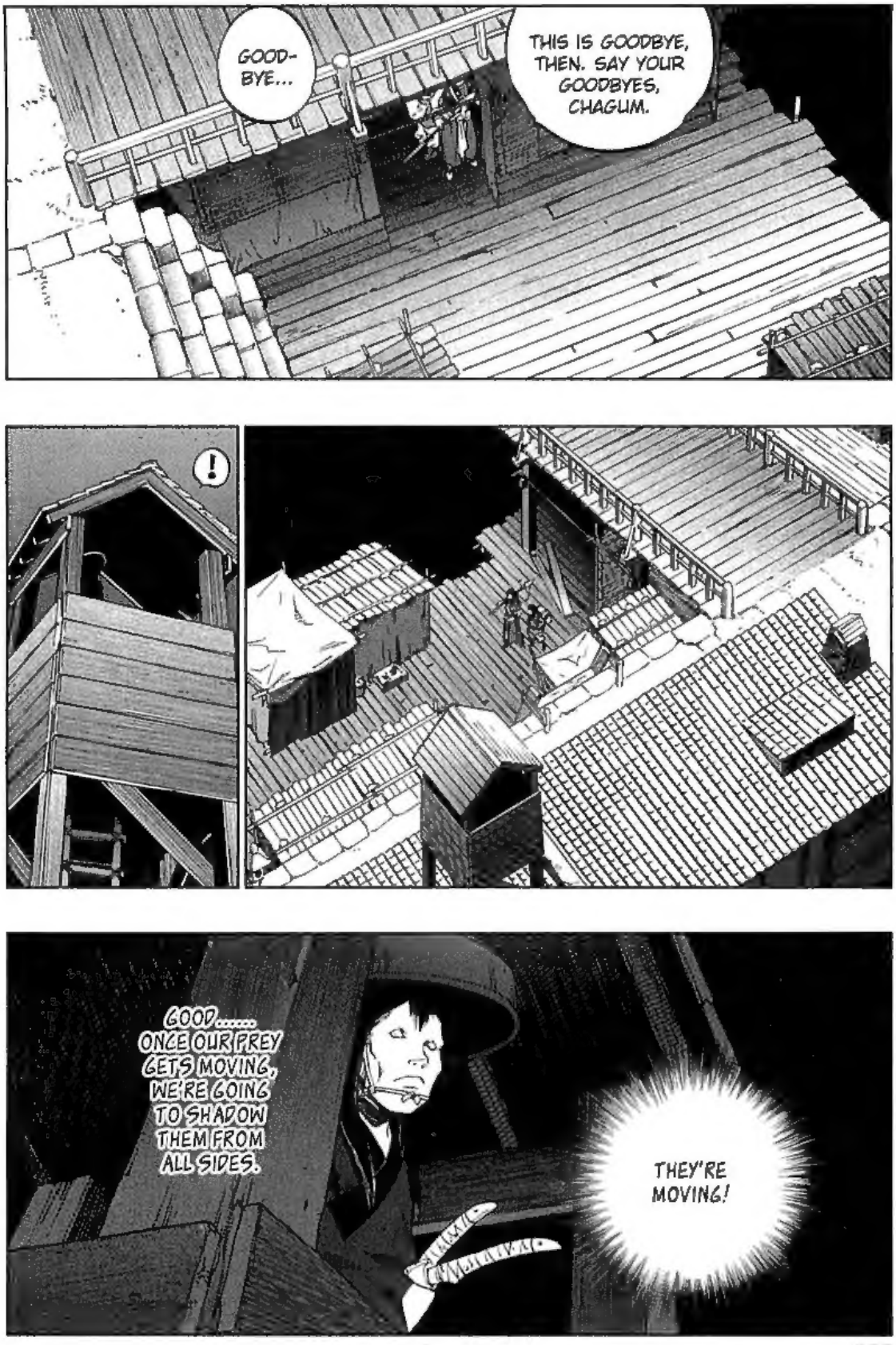
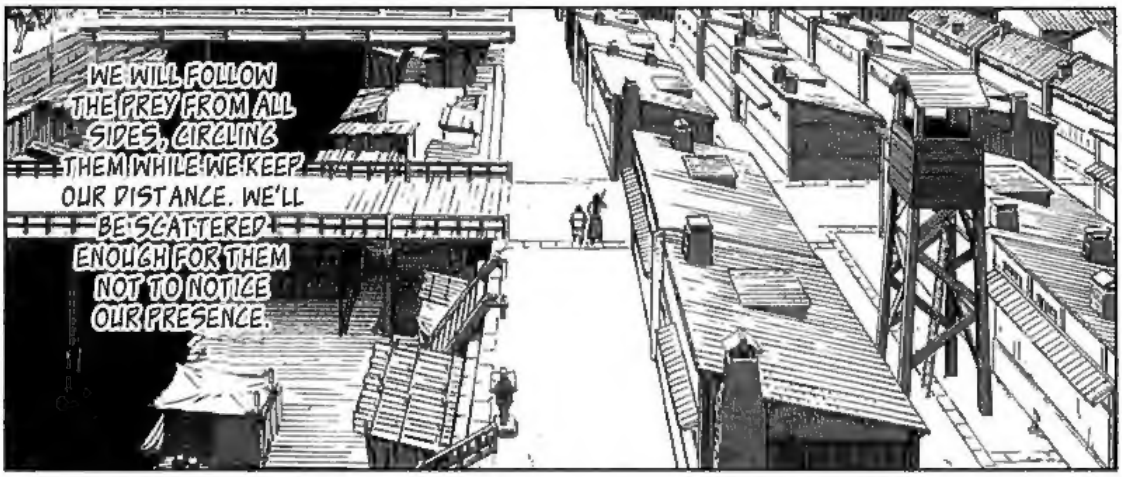
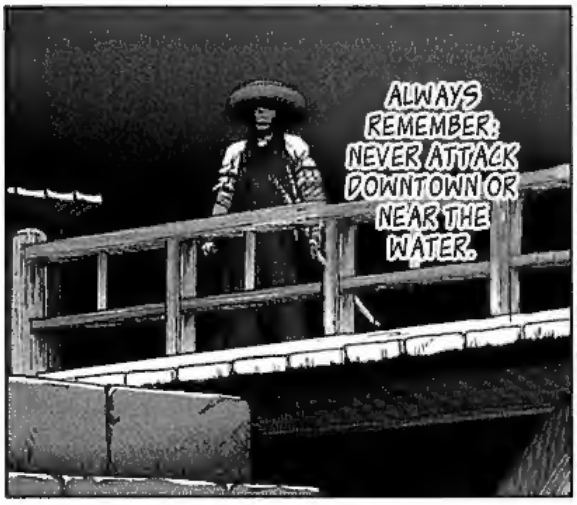
CHAPTER 4
THE HUNTER AND THE HUNTED

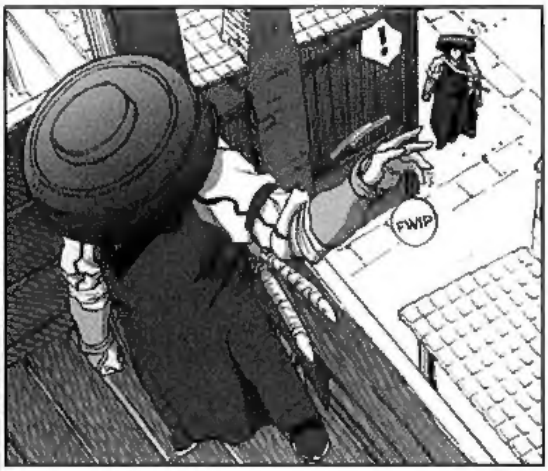
MY STOMACH FEELS ITCHY...
IT WOULD BE A BIG MISTAKE NOT TO USE SOME ANIMAL SKIN TO PROTECT IT.
IF SOMEONE STABS YOU FROM BEHIND, WITHOUT YOUR RIBS, IT'S GOING TO PIERCE STRAIGHT TO YOUR HEART.
BUT YOU'RE ALREADY WEARING A PACK AS TALL AS YOUR NECK, SO YOUR BACK IS PROTECTED FROM ANY ARROWS THAT MIGHT COME FLYING FROM BEHIND.
SO IT MIGHT FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT IT'S BETTER THAN DYING.
.....

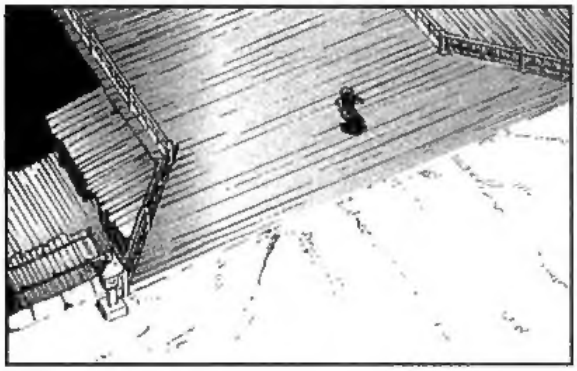
SHOULD I GO WITH YOU UP TO THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN? I CAN BE THERE TO MAKE SURE NO ONE'S FOLLOWING YOU.
YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT HELP, TOUYA, SAYA. I HOPE WE GET THE CHANCE TO MEET AGAIN.
OKAY, LET'S GO.
IF SOMEONE COMES FOR YOU, JUST TELL THEM EVERYTHING... UNDERSTAND? I'M SURE WE CAN GET AWAY EVEN IF YOU TALK.
WE'LL BE FINE. BUT I APPRECIATE THE THOUGHT, THANK YOU.
OKAY, BALSA-SAN!
WE'VE INTRUDED ON YOU ENOUGH. THANK YOU FOR ALL THE HELP.
EVEN IF WE WERE BEING FOLLOWED, YOU WOULD BE KILLED IN ONE BLOW, BEFORE YOU EVEN REALIZED IT.
YOU DON'T NEED TO FEEL ANY KIND OF OBLIGATION TO ME AFTER THIS.


GOOD-BYE...
THIS IS GOODBYE, THEN. SAY YOUR GOODBYES, CHAGUM.
!
GOOD..... ONCE OUR PREY GETS MOVING, WE'RE GOING TO SHADOW THEM FROM ALL SIDES.
THEY'RE MOVING!

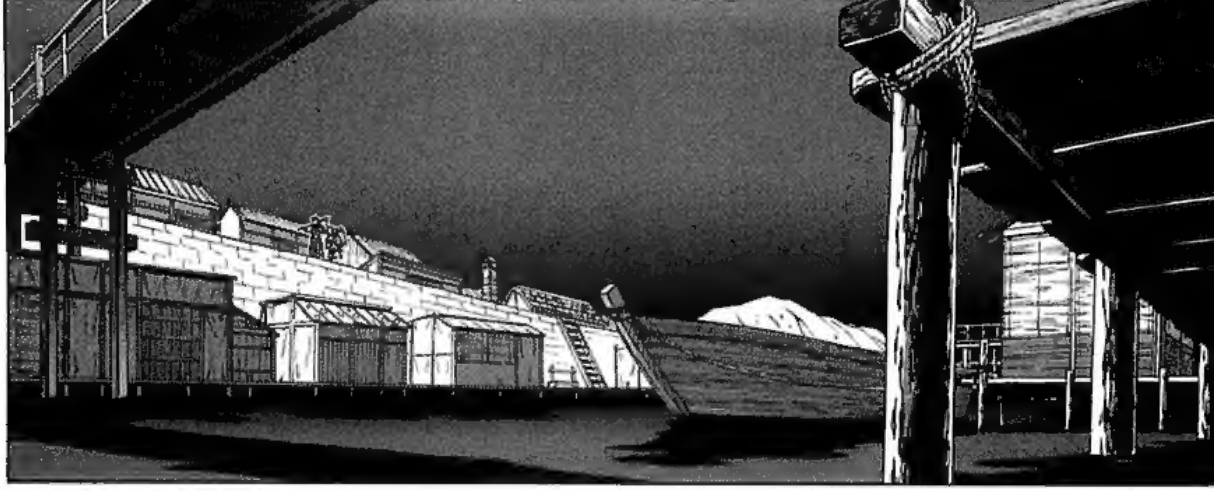

WE WILL FOLLOW THE PREY FROM ALL SIDES, CIRCLING THEM WHILE WE KEEP OUR DISTANCE. WE'LL BE SCATTERED ENOUGH FOR THEM NOT TO NOTICE OUR PRESENCE.

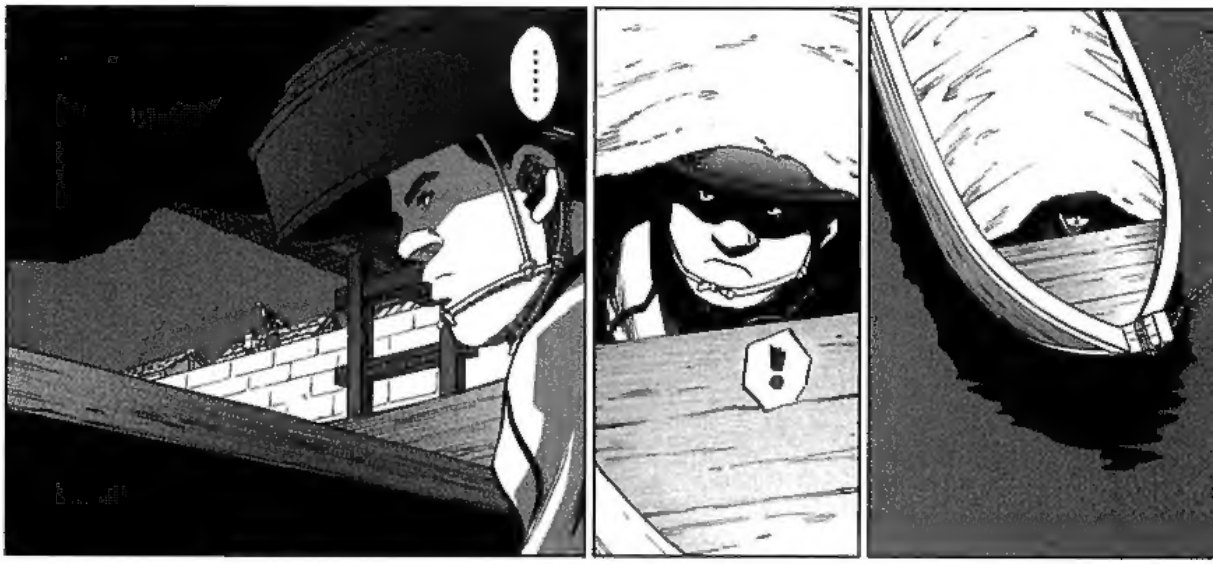

ALWAYS REMEMBER: NEVER ATTACK DOWNTOWN OR NEAR THE WATER.


!
FWIP

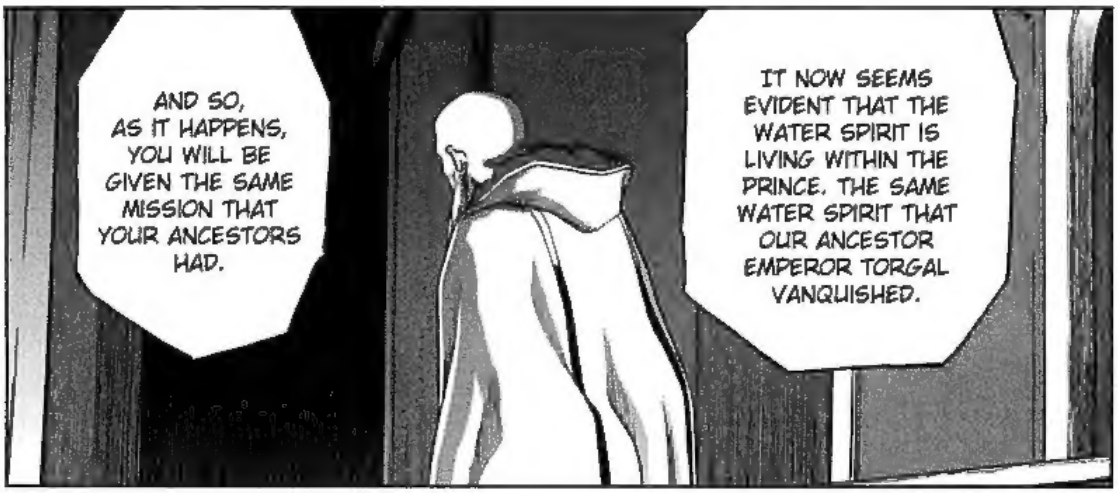


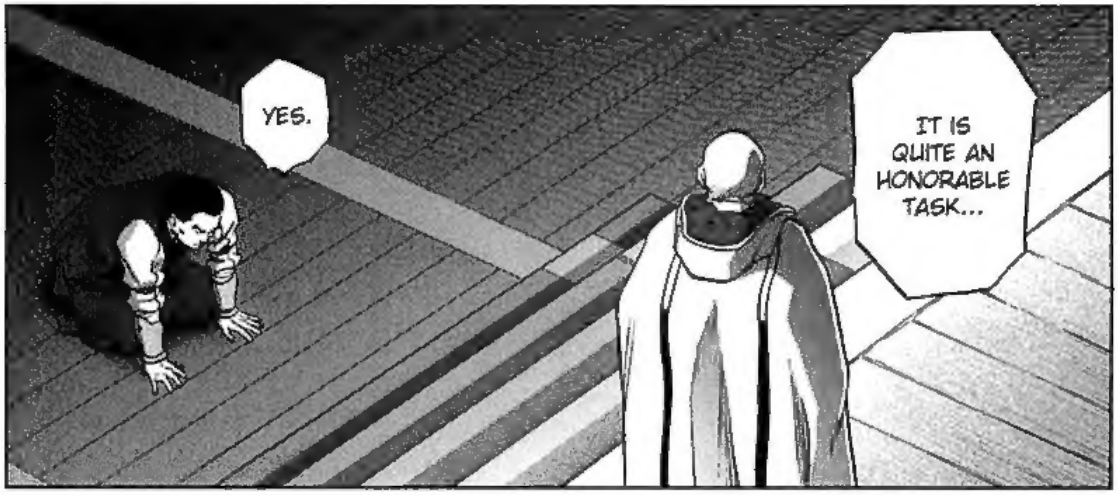
NOD





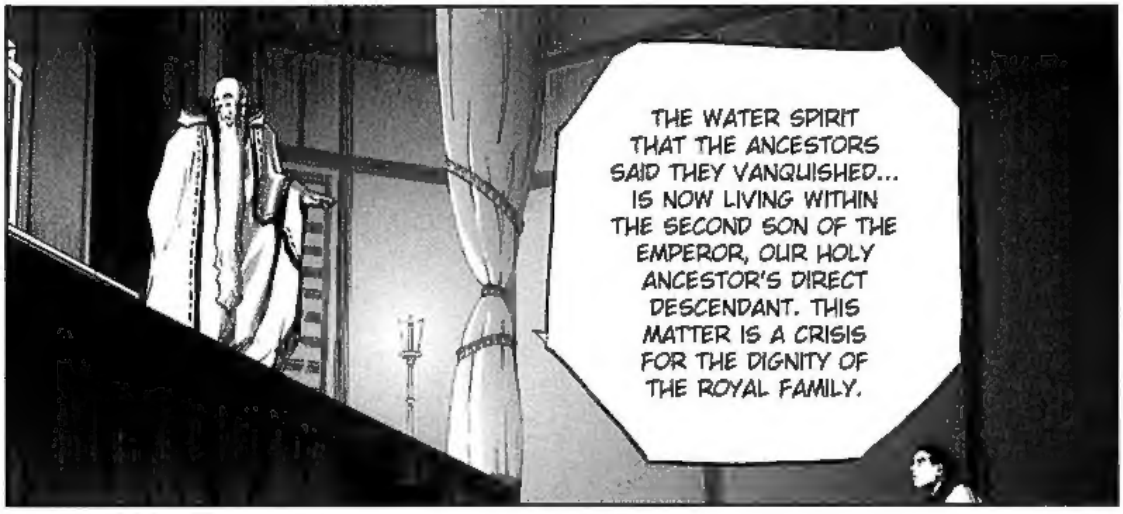
MON...
.....
YOU DON'T NEED TO CONCEAL THE FACT THAT YOU'RE WORRIED.
IN TRUTH... I'VE PLANNED TO HAVE THE PRINCE ASSASSINATED AS A CONTINGENCY PLAN IN CASE EVERYTHING FAILS.
!
LISTEN WELL...
SO WE CAN FIND OUT WHAT EXACTLY IT IS THAT IS LIVING WITHIN THE PRINCE.


AND SO, AS IT HAPPENS, YOU WILL BE GIVEN THE SAME MISSION THAT YOUR ANCESTORS HAD.
IT NOW SEEMS EVIDENT THAT THE WATER SPIRIT IS LIVING WITHIN THE PRINCE. THE SAME WATER SPIRIT THAT OUR ANCESTOR EMPEROR TORGAL VANQUISHED.


YES.
IT IS QUITE AN HONORABLE TASK...

THEN, THE CHILD WITHIN WHICH THE SPIRIT LIVED WAS TORN IN TWO AND DIED.
THE HUNTERS BACK THEN WERE OVER-WHELMED BY THE WATER SPIRIT'S POWER, HAVING BARELY EVEN STARTED THEIR INVESTIGATION.
I LEARNED FROM MY FATHER... THAT 100 YEARS AGO, A WATER SPIRIT DID COME FORTH IN THIS LAND.

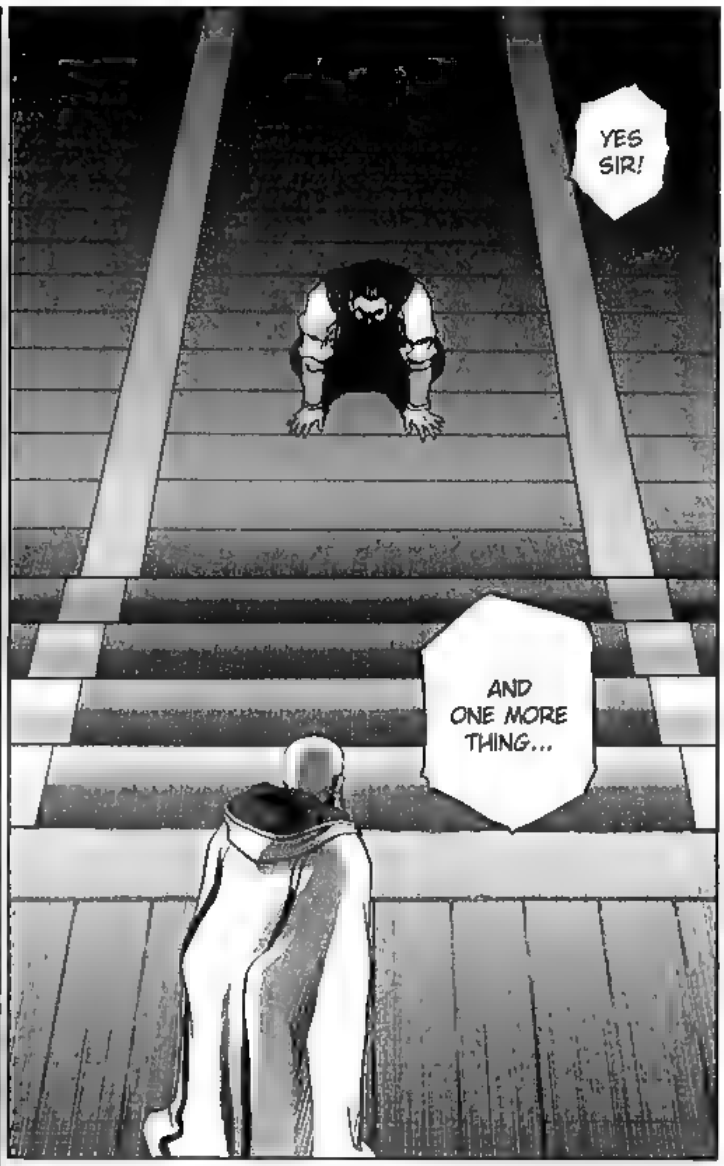
THEN ON THE 100TH YEAR, IT HAS NOW AGAIN APPEARED WITHIN THE PRINCE...
SINCE THEN... THERE HAS BEEN NO WORD OF THE WATER SPIRIT FOR 100 YEARS...


THE WATER SPIRIT THAT THE ANCESTORS SAID THEY VANQUISHED... IS NOW LIVING WITHIN THE SECOND SON OF THE EMPEROR, OUR HOLY ANCESTOR'S DIRECT DESCENDANT. THIS MATTER IS A CRISIS FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.

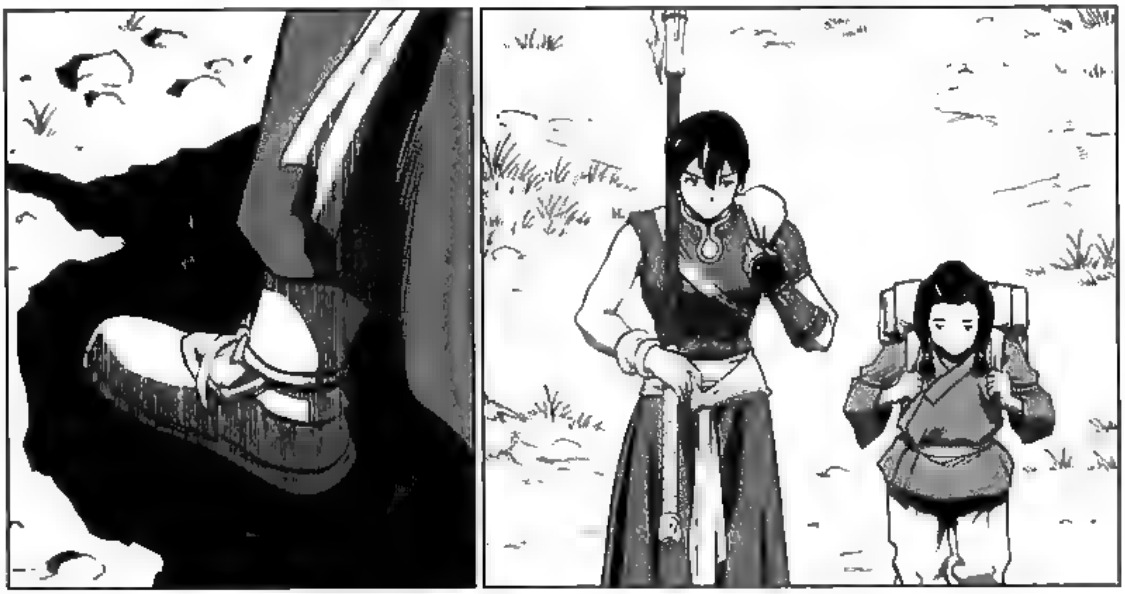
WE HAVE TO TAKE THE PRINCE BEFORE HE GETS KILLED BY THE SPIRIT!
...I DO NOT KNOW IF THIS IS THE WATER SPIRIT'S WAY TO EXACT ITS REVENGE... IF IT IS, WE WOULD HAVE TO COMPLETELY DESTROY IT!

KILL THAT BODYGUARD WHO TOOK THE PRINCE!
BUT BRING THE PRINCE HERE ALIVE!

THE WATER SPIRIT SEEMS TO BE MANIPULATING THE PRINCE. WE HAVE TO KEEP THAT IN MIND AS WE SEARCH FOR HIM.


YES SIR!
AND ONE MORE THING...

I HAVE TO TELL MY MEN...
WE HAVE TO BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL NEAR BODIES OF WATER.



IT'S AWFULLY BRIGHT TONIGHT... OUR SHADOWS LOOK EXTRA DARK.

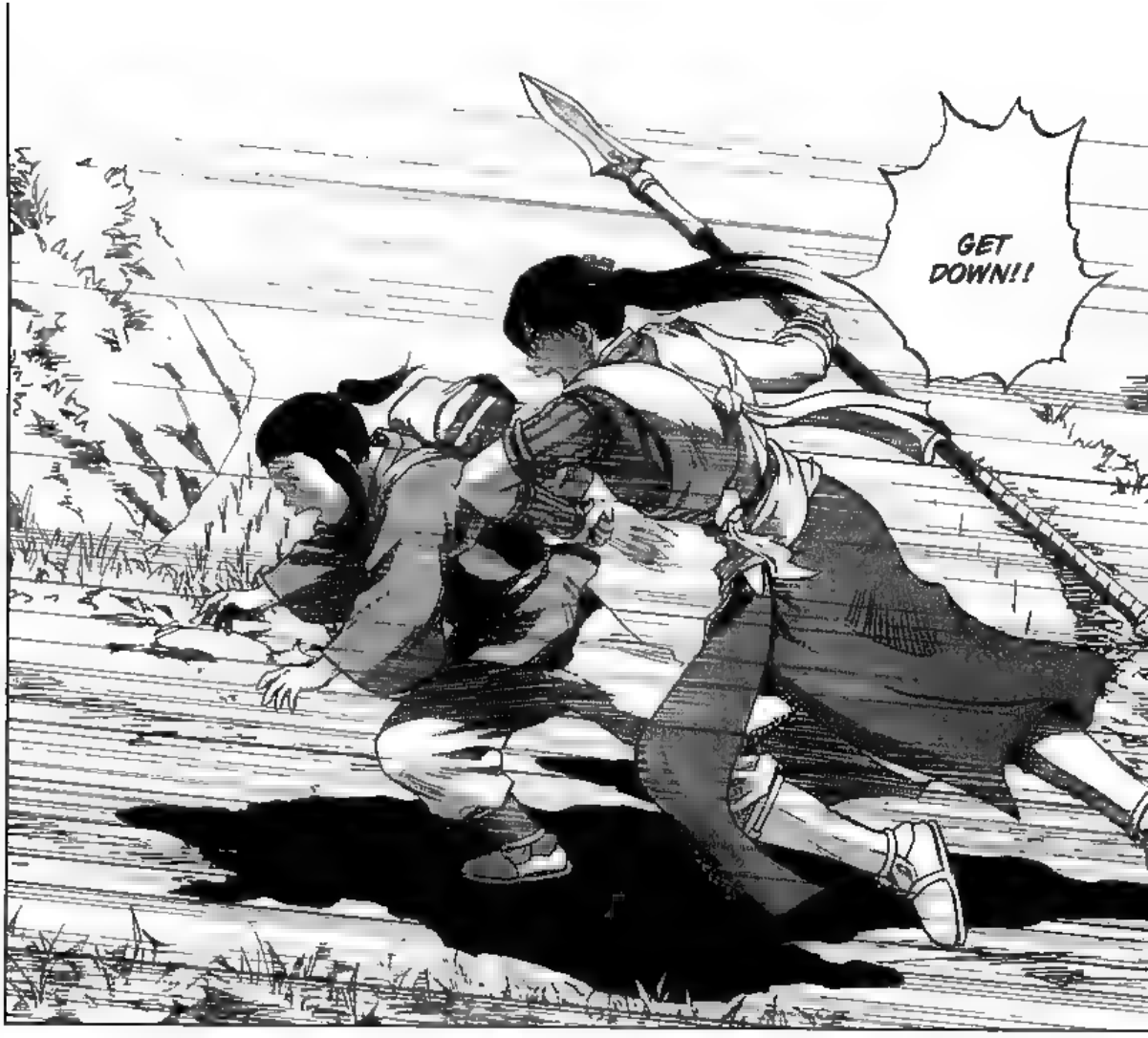
IF THEY FIND OUT...

!?
THE TWO MOONS AREN'T EVEN FULL YET...

THAT WE'RE WALKING IN AN OPEN AREA...

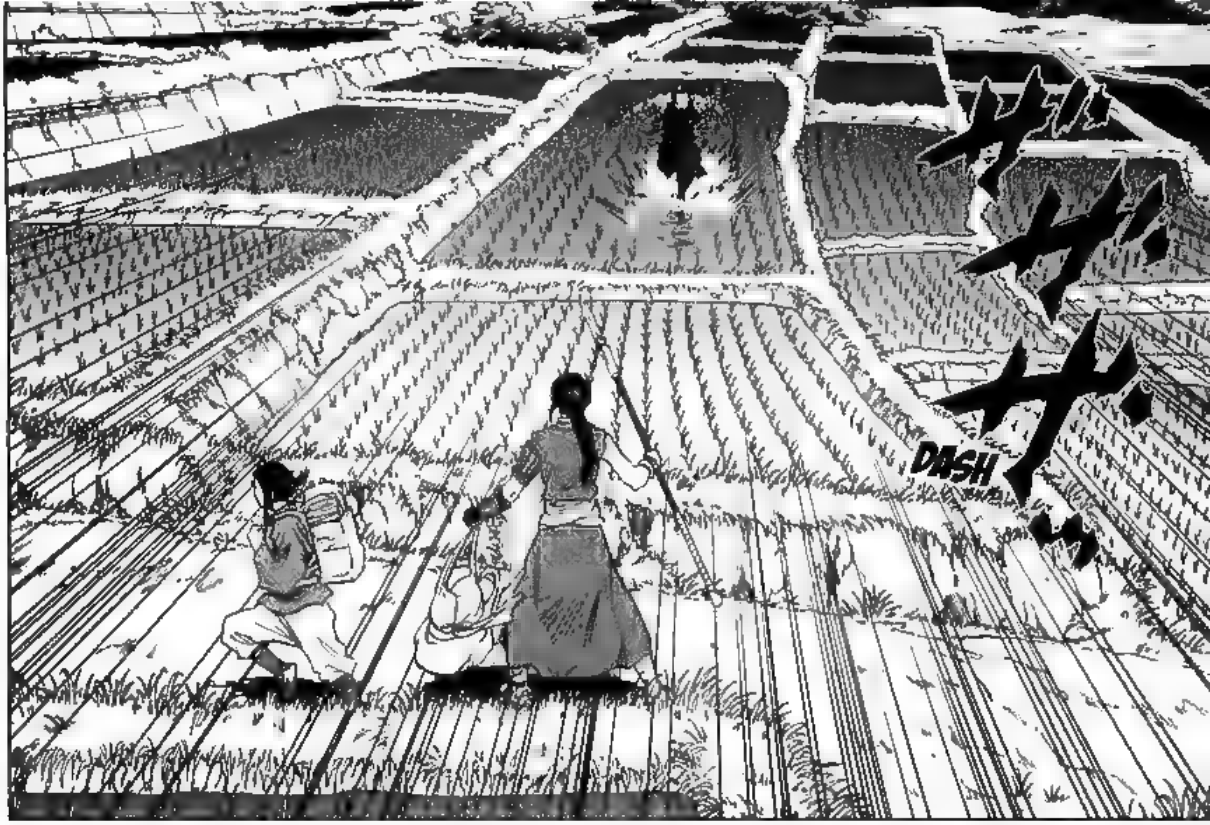
THIS IS WHERE THEY WILL ATTACK US

SLIP
?
STAY IN FRONT OF ME, CHAGUM.
RUSTLE
!!


GET DOWN!!

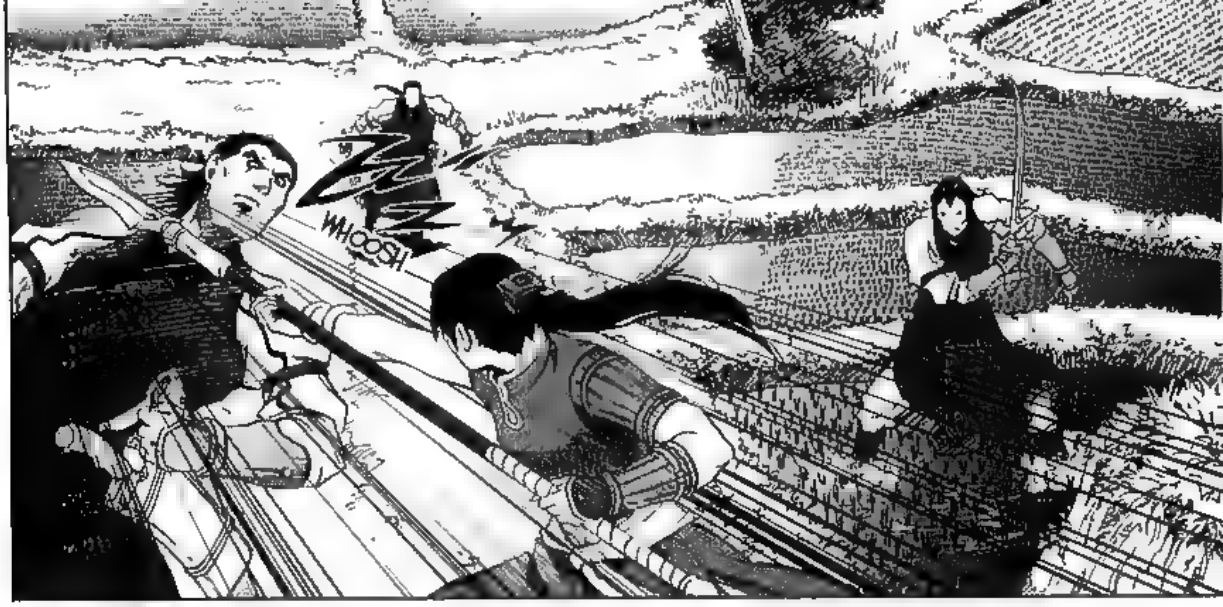
THERE!!
WOOSH

DASH
RUSTLE
I MIS-SED!
DAMN,
RUN, CHAGUM!!

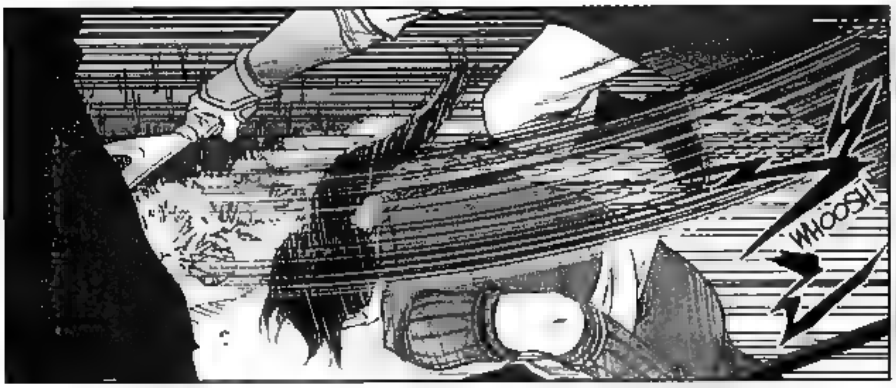

DASH

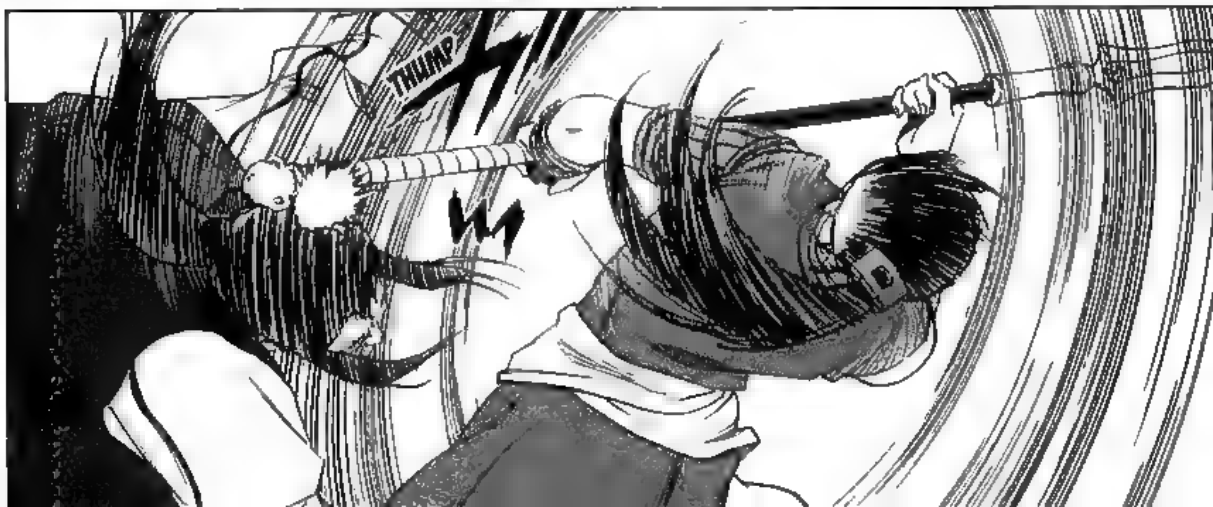
HE'S QUICK!!

FWISH
CLANG


WHOOSH!

FWIP

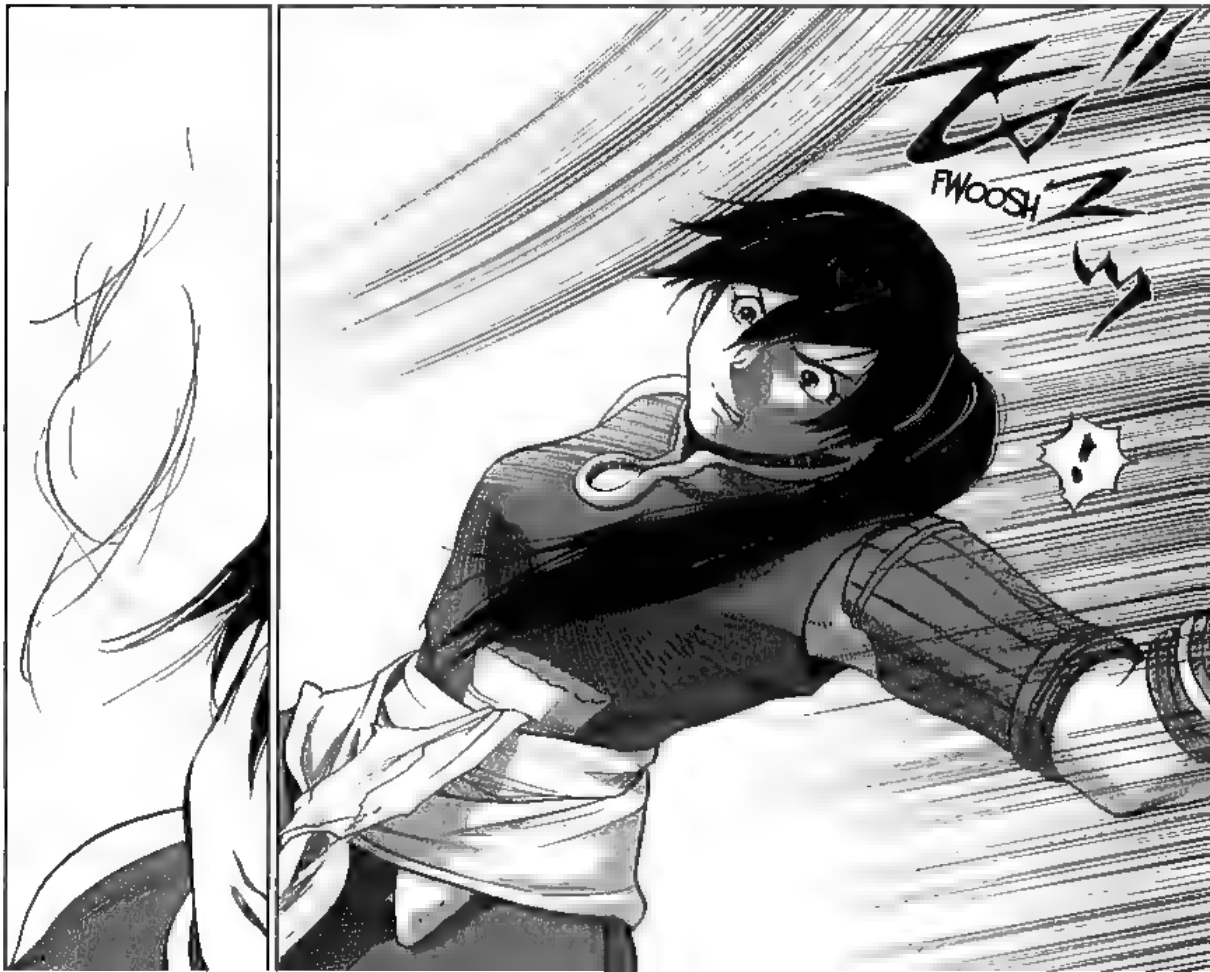

WHOOSH!


THUMP

FWISH
THUD

FWISH

WHOOSH
CLANK

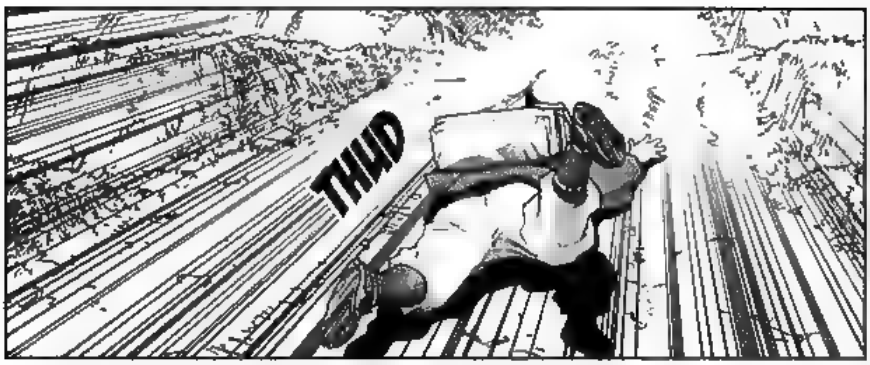

FWOOSH

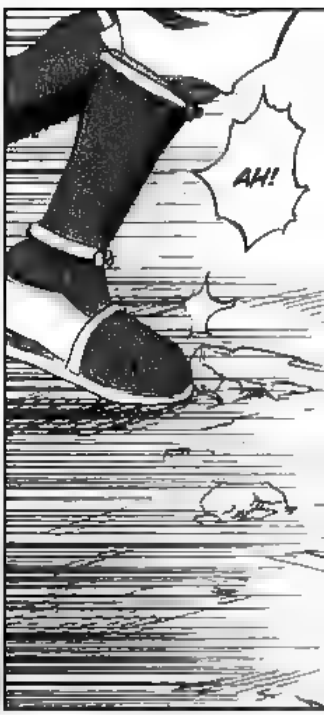
CLANG
BAM

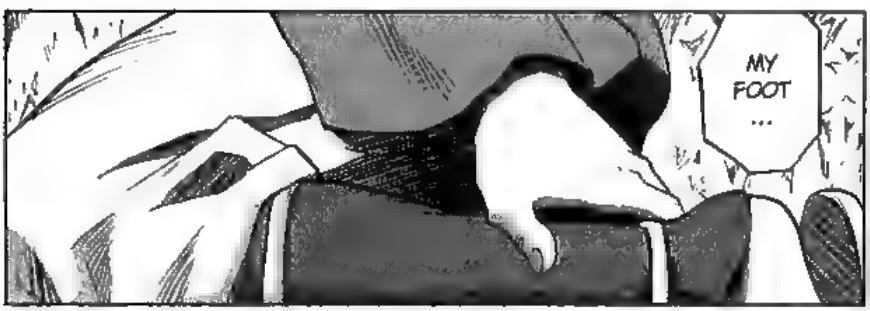
I CAN'T FIND AN OPENING TO ATTACK. BUT I'LL GET NOWHERE IF I JUST KEEP ON DEFENDING...
UGH!
HI
WHOOSH
SWISH
CLANG

WHAT KIND OF MOVES ARE THESE...? AS SOON AS I STRIKE WITH MY SWORD, SHE MANEUVERS HERSELF OUT... MY SWORD IS ALREADY GETTING TATTERED.

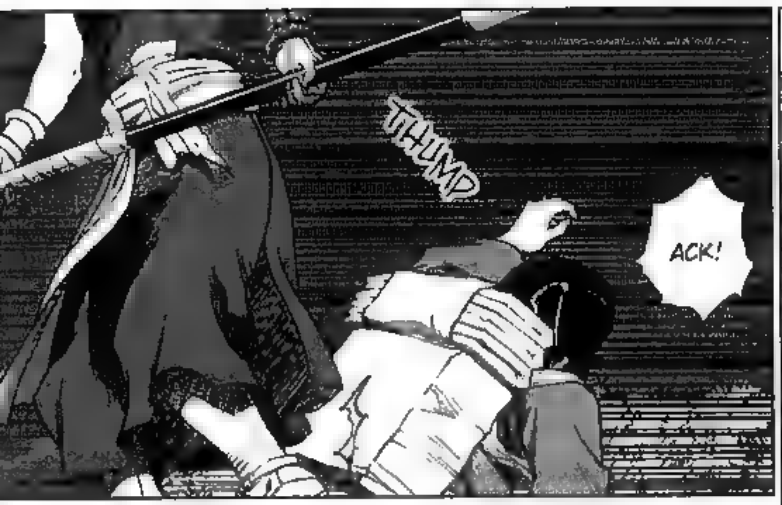
BALSA...


THUD


AH!

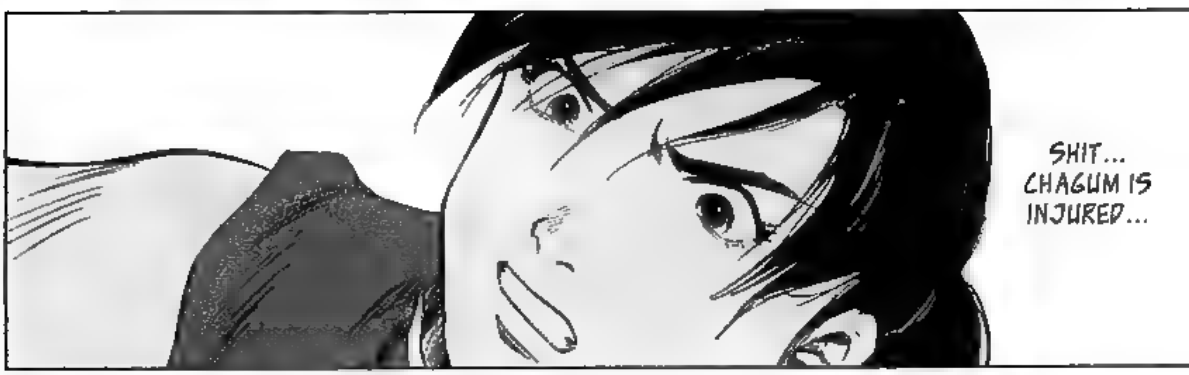

MY FOOT ...

URGH...


THUMP
ACK!

DASH

WHAT
!?
!!


SHIT...
CHAGUM IS
INJURED...

WHOOSH

!!
CLANG

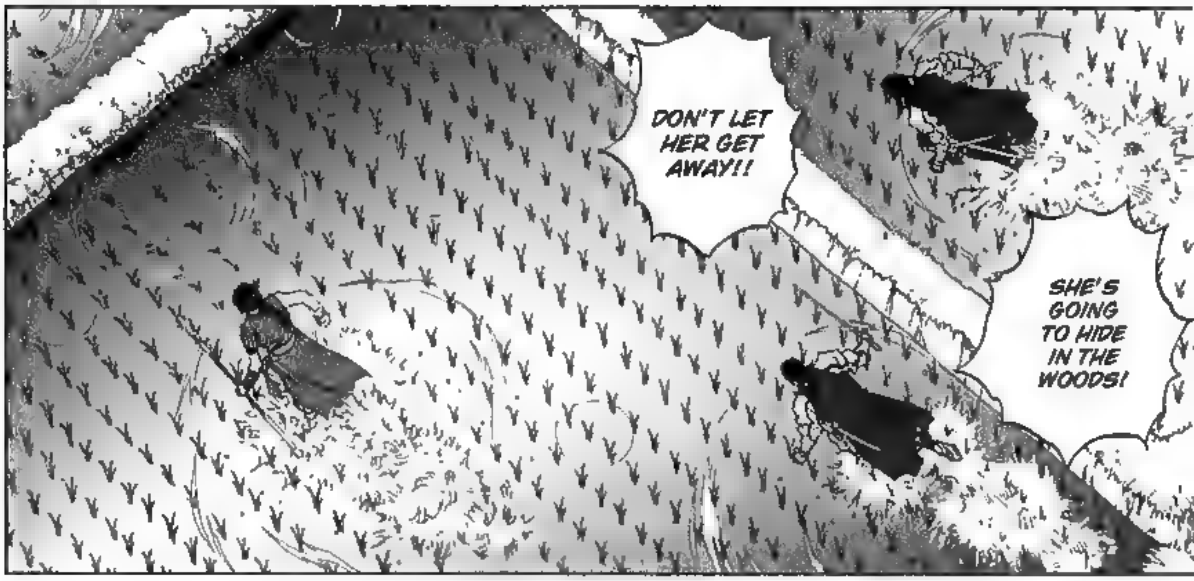
ONLY SAY ONE THING!
THEIR MOVEMENTS...

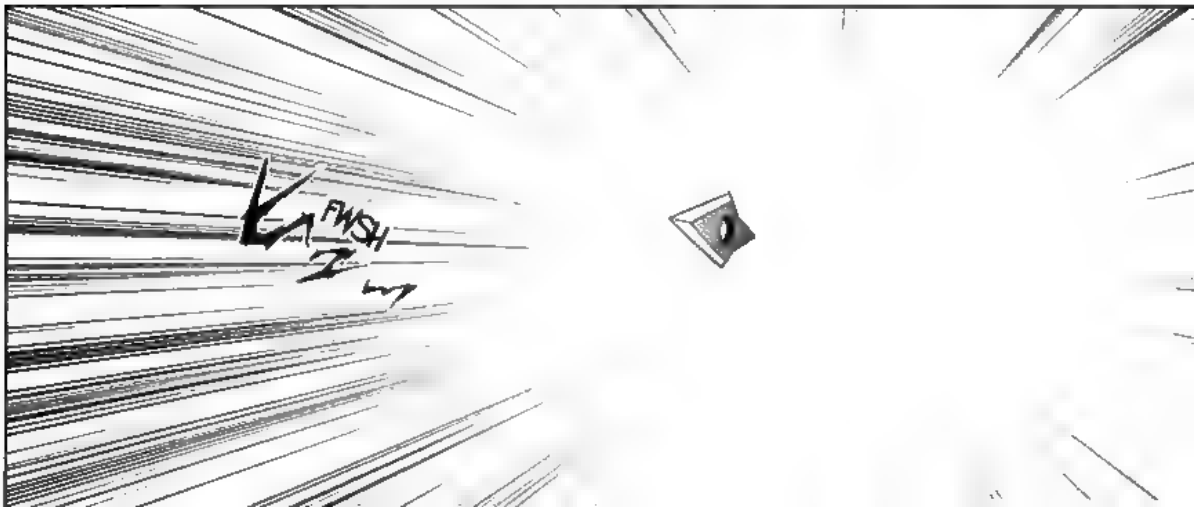
IT'S ONLY ME THEY'RE TARGETING! THEN THAT MEANS...

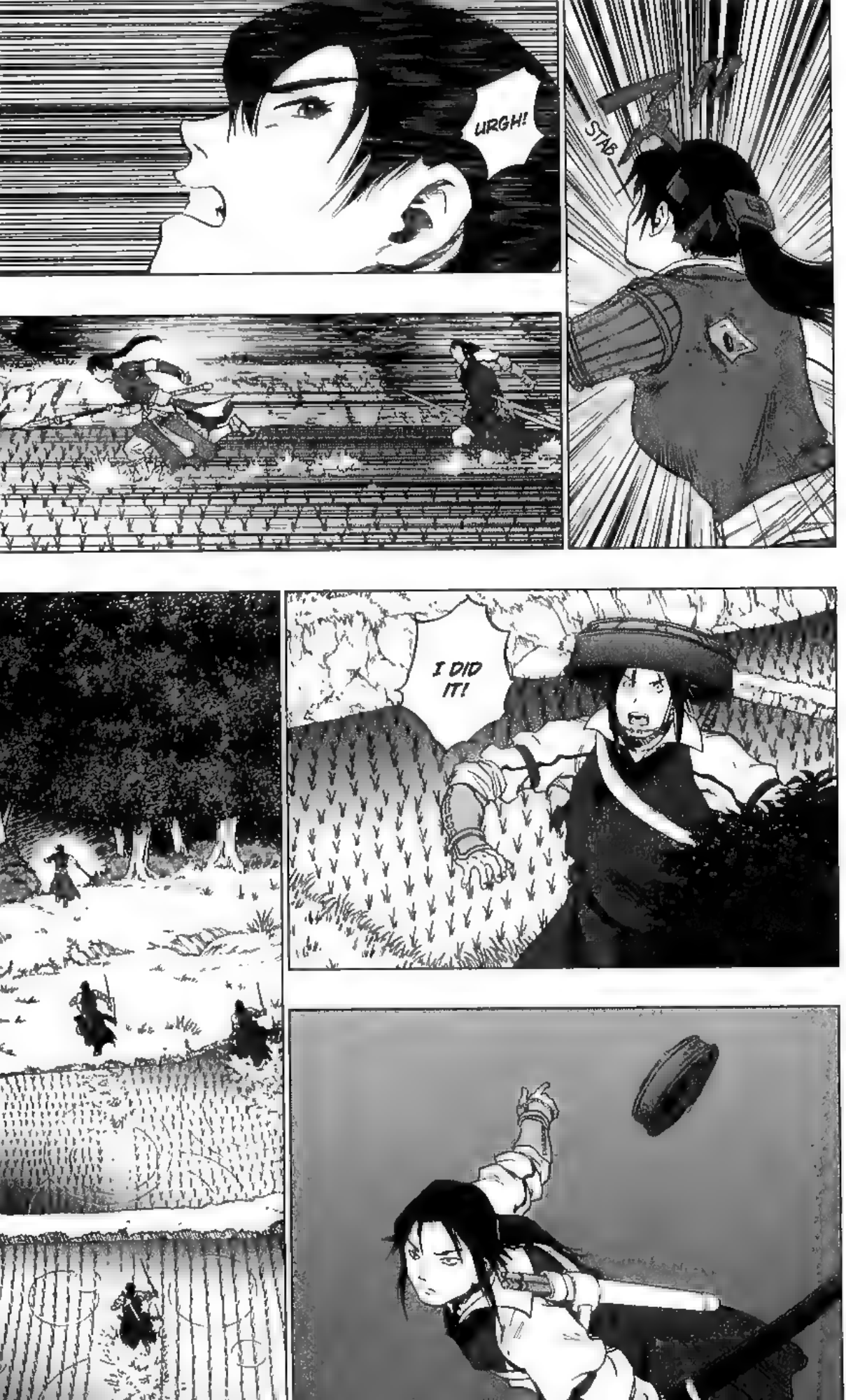
FWSH

WHAP
FWIP
AGH!
WHOOSH

!
DASH


DON'T LET HER GET AWAY!!
SHE'S GOING TO HIDE IN THE WOODS!


KA
FWSH

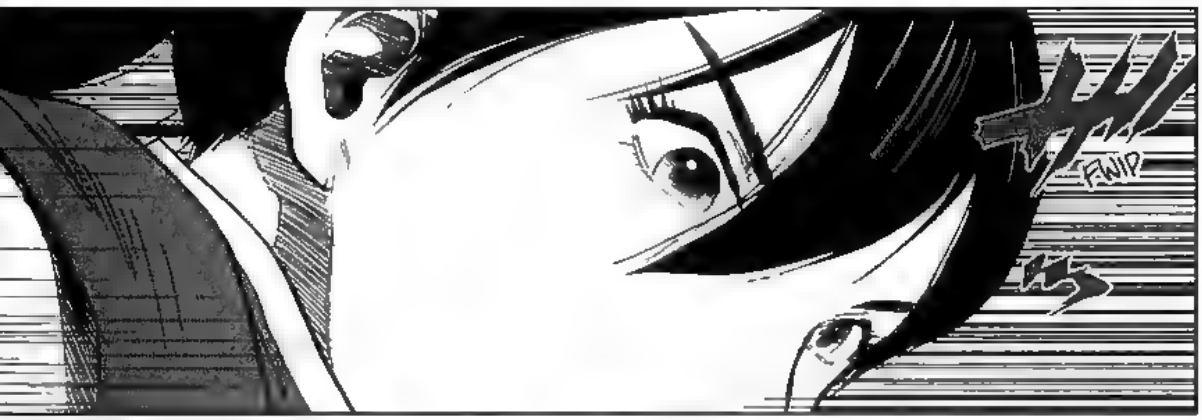

URGH!
STAB
I DID IT!

SNIPE
WHIRL

GUW AAH!
WHAP
!!

CRASH
KSHHH
FWIP

WHAP


FWIP

WHAT?! SHE'S STILL LUNGING IN AFTER I'VE HIT HER!!
WHOOSH

!!
CRACK

I'LL GO AFTER HER.
YOU BRING IN THE CHIEF AND TAKE THE PRINCE.

THE CHIEF!

WAIT!!

WHERE
IS SHE
HIDING..

SHE'S WOUNDED... ANYONE ELSE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HOLD THEIR POSITION RIGHT NOW JUST FROM THE PAIN AND THE FEAR OF BEING CHASED.

BUT... SHE HAS COMPLETELY SUPPRESSED ALL SIGNS OF HER PRESENCE.
I'VE HEARD ALL THE RUMORS, BUT I NEVER THOUGHT SHE WOULD BE THIS SKILLED...

BUT NO MATTER HOW YOU PUT IT, SHE'S FAILED.
WHETHER I WAIT FOR HER TO MOVE OR GO NOW AND HELP THE OTHER THREE WHO WERE WOUNDED... NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS NOW, WE HAVE ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED THE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL.

WE PUT THE PRINCE TO SLEEP. WHAT HAPPENED TO BALSA?
I'LL TAKE THE PRINCE. WE'LL GO ALONG THE TORINAKI RIVER AND ENTER THE SHRINE WITHOUT HAVING TO GO THROUGH THE TOWN.
SHE'S DEFINITELY USED TO HAVING HER LIFE IN DANGER. SHE'S COMPLETELY HIDDEN ALL TRACES OF HER PRESENCE.
DON'T ENTER THROUGH THE TOWN. YOU'RE GOING TO STAND OUT LOOKING LIKE THAT.
YOU AND ZEN CARRY THE CHIEF. TAKE YOUR TIME AND FOLLOW.

THAT BITCH...

.....

I SCREWED UP... BUT MY WOUNDS ARE SHALLOW, IT'S NOT GOING TO HURT FOR LONG.

WAIT FOR ME... I'LL COME AND GET YOU...
CHAGUM...